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NORTH CHICAGO -- In a generally rundown neighborhood on Park Avenue a beautiful bi-level, single family home is rising like a phoenix.

The three-bedroom house is being built by some 50 area teenagers, participants of the YouthBuild Lake County, a program which provides training in the building trades to youths, particularly for those who dropped out of school.

The 1,900-square-foot house with 2 1/2 baths is being professionally done with labor of love.

"These young people really put their hearts and souls into building it," said Terry Lenz, construction manager of Lake County YouthBuild, with obvious pride.

Using the construction trades lingo, he said, "It is plumb, level and straight."

U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, reaffirmed the program's importance Wednesday when he announced at the site a \$700,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to enable the program to continue.

The grant, he said, "will help high school dropouts acquire a marketable skill and support efforts to replace run-down homes in North Chicago with new, affordable housing."

To lend a helping hand, W.W. Grainger, the Lake Forest-based supplier of maintenance products, gave \$5,000 to the program and donated tools and construction supplies.

"We want to take the opportunity to participate in the program and invest in the future of our young people," said Octavia Matthews, a Grainger vice president.

Jose Vazquez, 18, of Waukegan is one of the miracle workers. So is his brother, Fernando, 17. Both are dropouts from Waukegan High School. This hands-on training they acknowledged gave them a second chance to put their future in focus.

"I just wanted to help out," said Jose who hopes to eventually get certified as an electrician through the program and by attending the College of Lake County.

On the job site he is working as a roofer, dry-wall hanger and at a variety of other tasks. Fernando, who is doing similar tasks, said he is working to get his general education degree to make up for dropping out of school.

Alantae Cole, 17, another participant. admitted he got kicked out of high school after he fell in with the wrong crowd and began skipping school and using drugs.

"YouthBuild has been important to me," said Cole. "It gives me a reason to wake up every day and do something positive. It has helped me to quit doing drugs and stay motivated," he added.

These youths will not be lacking for work. After the house is completed in June, Lenz said YouthBuild will start building another house next to it.